

ASSOCIATION OF WASHINGTON CITIES ON DIVERSITY: THE UNTAPPED POWER OF THE VOTE

Every year, citizens in Washington State and around the country have the opportunity to make their voices heard in a powerful way – by taking advantage of their right to vote. Every year, thousands of citizens remain silent.

Who voted in the last presidential election? Census data shows that nearly two-thirds of Washington citizens registered to vote, and however, some groups were underrepresented:

2000 Voter Turnout by Race/Ethnicity		
Race/Ethnicity	% Registered to Vote	% Voted
Caucasian	69%	63%
African American	51%	32%
Hispanic/Latino	42%	35%
Asian/Pacific Islander	42%	28%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000

Why didn't people vote? Through data about Native Americans' voting behavior is not available, people of all racial/ethnic groups appear to have the same reasons for not voting, as shown in Table 2. It is possible to overcome most of these reasons through positive leadership and resources now available to make voting easier.

TOP REASONS FOR NOT VOTING IN NOV. 2000 ELECTION BY RACE/ETHNICITY			
Race/Ethnicity	#1 Reason	#2 Reason	#3 Reason
Caucasian	To busy (20%)	Illness/Disability (15%)	Not Interested (12%)
African American	To busy (19%)	Illness/Disability (15%)	Not Interested (13%)
Hispanic/Latino	To busy (28%)	Illness/Disability (16%)	Not Interested (10%)
Asian/Pacific Islander	To busy (25%)	Not Interested (14%)	Out of Town (13%)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000

How can local leaders help to make a difference? Regina Jones, Executive Director of the Washington Commission on African American Affairs, encourages local leaders – from cities, counties, schools, and community organizations – to join together in an effort to get out and vote.

Ms. Jones had these suggestions:

- Post information about easy ways to register and vote on your website – be sure to include absentee voting.
- Also on your website, post information about the issues and candidates on the ballot – include tips on how to get informed about each of them.
- Visit local organizations – such as the NAACP and Hispanic Business Professionals Association – and talk with their members about these issues.
- Contact the state's Commissions on Asian/Pacific Islander, American Indian, African American and Hispanic Affairs for help making connections with cultural organizations in your community.

Local leaders can help more people tap the power of their votes.

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